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ACTIVE SERVICE ON THE WESTERN FRONT

BY EMMA QUANDT, R.N.

Chicago, Ill.

During the spring of 1915, the late Dr. J. B. Murphy organized, at the request of Sir Arbuthnot Lane, a complete hospital unit to cover all special departments, consisting of thirty-two doctors and seventy-five nurses. The expenses of this unit, known as the Chicago Medical Unit, were defrayed by the British Government.

We left Chicago on June 13th, and sailed from New York on the 15th, reaching Falmouth ten days later. A week was spent in London, where we were quartered at the York Hotel. During this time we were provided with uniforms and various receptions were given for us. On Saturday, the eventful day, the call came, "Proceed to the front at once." Entirely ignorant of our ultimate destination, we had a hurried luncheon at the hotel, then off to the Victoria Station where a special train was waiting.

Arriving at Folkstone, we experienced our first taste of what war meant to wives, mothers and children. In the harbor lay a large transport waiting to take us. The docks were crowded with hundreds of troops and officers saying a last farewell to their loved ones. Women and children in tears, mothers with their babies in their arms clinging to their husbands, made a picture I shall never forget. Imagine 75 nurses on this man-of-war with hundreds of soldiers. The sea was very rough at times and the ship had to plough its way through a net of mines. It gave us a creepy feeling as we crossed the danger zone. It seemed as though the old Channel were yearning to swallow us into its depths. In the distance loomed the city of Boulogne. It looked to us, as we drew nearer to shore, like a haven of rest.

When we arrived in France, the French and the British authorities met us and gave us a warm and royal welcome. The chief constable gave orders, as our passports were presented, "Ze American doctors and sisters please pass out first, passports not necessary." The crowd stood aside while our party took possession of the gangplank, and so we passed ashore into the beautiful country of France. To greet our party were the Matron-in-Chief, Colonel Carr and other high officials of the British Royal Army Medical Corps. After their cordial welcome, we were conducted to large motor busses, carrying 30 passengers each, which were to take us to our final destination, a village called Etaples. Soon we were all speeding away at fifty miles an hour, passing through many villages, the inhabitants of which seemed to be mostly women, for every man in France was doing

his bit at the front. Agriculture as well as domestic and clerical work is carried on by women to the best of their ability. No lights anywhere! In all windows, shades were closely drawn as a safeguard against Zeppelin raids. Finally the motor slowed up. We saw people with lanterns moving here and there. The machine stopped, the chauffeur announced we had come to the end of our journey.

As far as the eye could see, the surrounding country was covered with tents, men in khaki and women in military uniforms. We did not have long to ponder over our situation. With open arms we were made welcome by the sweet-faced English sisters who led the way to a large canvas tent called The Sisters' Mess. Here they had worked for hours to prepare a banquet for us. The decorations were American flags made out of blue and red handkerchiefs, the stars cut out of white muslin and sewed on. Flowers had been gathered from the woods near the fighting grounds, red and white poppies arranged artistically to represent American colors. When all had been seated, we were welcomed and toasted by the Matron-in-chief, who, in turn, was responded to by our Matron-in-chief. All of this work, the cooking, the serving, and arranging for our sleeping quarters had been done by the English sisters with the help of the orderlies. After we had dined, we were shown to our temporary sleeping quarters, long wooden huts with thirty beds in each, a welcome and inviting sight! Wooden tables with enameled wash-basins, pitchers of hot water, soap and towels were at our disposal. We were told there was also a bath house with six bathtubs, hot and cold water, with lavatories attached, exclusively for the use of the nursing staff. All these modern conveniences came as a surprise to us as these necessary "luxuries" were not expected on active service.

I rose early on Sunday morning to acquaint myself with the new situation. The beautiful sight that met my eyes I shall never forget. There were rows and rows of dark brown tents set in the midst of scarlet poppies and various other wild flowers in bloom. These tents or huts were to be our future home during our stay in active service, each hut accommodating two sisters. We were also told that divine services were held in Hut 25 and we were invited to attend. The hut was divided by a thin wooden partition. The Church of England held services in the front part and the Roman Catholics had mass in the other part. The two denominations got on very well provided they did not talk too loud. After service, we set up housekeeping. "Some job!" The British Government furnished us with a complete army kit, comprising a collapsible bed, cork mattress, two pillows, one camp chair, waterproof wash-basin, small bathtub, water pail, oil stove, lantern, iron, tea kettle, mirror, three blankets, a cup and saucer, plate, knife, fork and spoon, and a set of surgical instruments. Civilian clothing is not permissible. The government furnished us

a tin trunk, which held all our precious belongings; these were nothing more than uniforms for service and street wear.

On Monday morning, our first day on duty, our matron assigned each one to her respective post. I happened to draw Hut B-9, a very heavy surgical section, so I was told. Hut B-9 was a shack of timber and tin, having 30 beds, one big dressing table and one eating table. The dishes were piled up in a corner. It was "up to me" to improvise a china closet. Fortunately I had two good orderlies who were handy with hammer and saw, so I put them to work at once making a china closet out of a packing box, also a place in the farthest corner of the hut in which to keep medical utensils. When this was finished there loomed up another problem, no place to put surgical dressings or solutions. After racking my brain to find a space in which to place shelves and cans for dressings, one of the orderlies brought in a box, a foot and a half square, added two shelves and a door with a lock, in which to keep all solutions and opiates. Above the dressing table, two long shelves were put up to use for surgical dressings, over which white muslin curtains were hung. In this way, our improvised furniture made the ward look quite attractive. In addition, four arm-chairs and a locker with two compartments are placed beside each bed for the use of the patients. Benges, my head orderly, came to me with this remark, "Sister, you Americans have a head for business and are joiners (carpenters) as well as nurses and not afraid to adapt yourselves to circumstances." Of course this was a great compliment for an Englishman to pay an American. I was very proud of my orderlies, as they were faithful, hard working men and very conscientious in caring for the wounded.

The day's work finished and my ward ready for receiving a convoy (the wounded from the trenches) we all retired early and were soon sound asleep. At 11.30 we were called for a convoy. Now the orderlies were truly valuable help to us! They had been previously trained and had served with British sisters, so they showed us how to prepare a stretcher bed for stretcher cases. The wounded were placed on the bed by the stretcher bearers just as they were picked up in the trenches in a horrible condition of mud and blood, and alive with trench lice. Their wounds had been roughly dressed by a field orderly. Strange to say, these men never grumbled or moaned with pain while we were removing their clothing. In many cases we had to cut their clothing off on account of terrible wounds. When this was done we dressed their wounds, gave them a sponge bath and clean pajamas. The orderlies then served hot chocolate with bread and butter sandwiches.

(To be continued)